

Images of Encirclement and Enchantment in the Poetry of Palamas

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The image of the circle recurs again and again, in a wide range of motifs, in Palamas' poetry. Indeed, some areas of his poetry seem to exhibit a positive preoccupation with circular images of both nature and artifice, the most frequently occurring of which are the sun, moon, crown/garland (*στεφάνι, στέμμα, κορώνα*), ring (*δαχτυλίδι*), the simple circle (*κύκλος*) and the girdle of embrace (*ζώνη ἀγκαλιᾶς*). Chains (*ἀλυσίδες*) also appear to function in some poems as symbols of encirclement. The majority of the contexts in which these images occur are metaphysical in theme and a great number of the images themselves are associated with ideas of daemonic power over Man. The question of the psychological motivation that underlies the symbolism of such images as the 'ring' and 'chains' in Palamas' poetry has been discussed to some extent by most of his critics.¹ What I intend to do here is to examine the poet's use of the whole range of 'circle' imagery as an aesthetic device and as a form of symbolism which he clearly considered to convey most effectively his ideas about his own dilemma and about the meaning of existence around him. I shall deal only with those images which can be called 'specifically' circular in that they are given expression by one or more of the key words discussed and are not just vague suggestions of some such idea.

1. Most notably by A. Dhoxas, *Palamas* (Athens, 1959) and K. Tsatsos, *Palamas* (Athens, 1949).

The key nouns in Palamas' 'circular' imagery are *στεφάνι*, *στέμμα*, *κορώνα*, *δαχτυλίδι*, *κύκλος*, *ἡλιος*, *φεγγάρι*, *ἀλυσίδα* and *ζώνη*, approximately in order of their frequency. Images featuring one or another of these words appear in well over half the total number of Palamas' published poems. In many of the shorter poems the 'circle' image appears only once or twice and is only tenuously related to the main theme. In many of the longer poems, however, such as *The Palm Tree*² and *The Dodecalogue of the Gypsy* it is a key image in the development of the intellectual theme and as such recurs several times within the same poem, sometimes as a repetition, sometimes as a variation of the initial image.

The frequency of occurrence of these images does not seem to be related to any particular chronological phase of Palamas' poetry, although it may be significant that the only collection of poems in which *no* such image occurs anywhere is *Tὰ παθητικὰ Κρυφομιλήματα* (1st series) written in 1910–1911 when the poet was entering on the later stages of his career as a creative artist. Again, it may be significant that those poems in which the circle as a metaphysical symbol of intellectual purpose is most sensitively and artistically developed, e.g. *The Palm Tree* and *The Dodecalogue*, were written around 1900 and in the years of Palamas' most intense poetic activity and most intense conflict with his own inner self and with the opponents of the intellectual revolution of the demoticists.

What is abundantly clear both from the poems themselves and from Palamas' memoirs³ is that he was attracted to cyclic and circular images of nature at a very young age. He recalls for us one of the earliest aesthetic experiences of his childhood—he must have been four or five years old—in *Tὰ Χρόνια μου καὶ τὰ χαρτιὰ μου*, his first conscious acquaintance with the moon, an experience that he clearly considered to have made a profound psychic impact on him at the time with formative implications for his aesthetic development. He says:

Βαστὼ τὸ ἀγνάντεμα, μέσο' ἀπὸ τ' ἀνοιχτὸ παράθυρο, τοῦ φεγγαριοῦ· τὸν ἐρχομό τοῦ φεγγαριοῦ, τὸ ξάπλωμά του ποὺ πλημ-

2. Discussed in greater detail below.

3. Contained in various writings of the *Ἄπαντα*, vols. II, IV, VI, VIII, X, XII and XIII. The most significant of these are those contained in vols. IV, VI, VIII and X.

μύριζε στὸ στρῶμα ἀπάνου, στὸ κορμὶ μον ἀπάνου· κάτι δόλιαμπρο μαζὶ κι ἐρωτικὸ καὶ παθητικὸ καὶ καθάριο καὶ λαγαρὸ καὶ ὀλόχυτο· κάτι σὰν προμήνυμα ζωῆς ποὺ θὰ τὴν περνοῦσα ἔτοι, σὰν ἀπὸ κάτου ἀπὸ φεγγάρι, γιομίζοντας τὴν ψυχὴ μου στάλα στάλα ἀπὸ τὸ ἀνάβρυσμά του μὲ τὴν ἀνέκφραστη μελαγχολία τῆς δόλαχνης γλύκας του. 'Η ποίηση μοῦ ἔκαμε ἀπὸ τότε τὴν πρώτη τῆς ἐπίσκεψη, ἀφανέρωτη ἀκόμα καὶ χωρὶς ὄνομα· ἵσα ἵσα γιὰ νὰ μὲ προετοιμάσῃ νὰ τὴ δεχτῶ, ύστερ' ἀπὸ λιγάκι, στὴν ὥρα τὴν ἐπαγγελμένη, μὲ τὸ ὄνομά της καὶ μὲ τὴ δόξα της. 'Η πρώτη μου γνωριμία μὲ τὸ φεγγάρι. Μοῦ μιλησε ἀπὸ τότε βαθύτερα· μὰ ποτὲ δὲ μὲ χάιδεψε, σὰν τότε, μὲ τὲτοια μητρικὴ ἀπαδωσύνη.⁴ Elsewhere he talks of his 'cyclical mania' in reference to his view of his own personality and of events as expressed in his poems,⁵ and it is clear from these and numerous other passing references that very early in his intellectual development he began to acquire a view of existence whose most profound aspects manifested themselves naturally to his mind's eye in forms of a spherical or circular nature. It is then a natural consequence of this early development of the aesthetic and intellectual self of Palamas that cyclic themes and circular images should appear as dominant features of his poetic style and that they should acquire a pre-eminent importance in the poet's most profound and beautiful examples of his art. Of course Palamas is not unique either in his 'cyclic' view or in his use of the 'circle' image as an aesthetic device. From the early Greek cosmologists to the present day, Western philosophy and literature have generated many of their most formative ideas through the genius of minds that also expressed their conception of existence in images of the sphere and the circle,⁶ but in contemporary Greek literature only Palamas has worked such a rich variety of images on this theme into the tapestry of his art.

I have drawn attention to the very early attraction of Palamas to circular images of nature. In a consideration of his conscious use of such images in his mature poetry the possibility of

4. Vol. IV, p. 301.

5. Ibid., vol. X, p. 553.

6. In literature notably Dante, Milton, Shelley and Solomos all of whom profoundly impressed Palamas and whose general influence is acknowledged in the many references to them and their work scattered throughout the prose-writings of the *Ἄπαντα*.

external stylistic influences must be taken into account. Palamas himself has acknowledged, both in his work of literary criticism and in his poems, the influence, to a greater or lesser extent, of all the great Renaissance and contemporary Western poets, but there is no evidence in his imagery of a direct influence from any one of these poets. He concerned himself closely with the work of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries in European and American poetry, particularly the French symbolist poets and among the Americans Walt Whitman,⁷ but the influence of all these external sources of inspiration seems to have been philosophical rather than directly stylistic. Maskaleris,⁸ in commenting on the influence of the French poets, asserts a direct stylistic influence from Sully Prudhomme on the symbolism of Palamas. He may be right to some extent in his claim; certainly the thirty translations contained in *Music Reintoned*,⁹ together with other comments,¹⁰ confirm Palamas' admiration for the art of Prudhomme. There is too, in the poems of Prudhomme, what we might call a remarkable affinity with much of Palamas' poetry in terms of mood and the poet's feeling for the world of nature. However, whatever Palamas may or may not have taken from Prudhomme and others, his attraction to, and aesthetic development of, circular images is clearly not derived from any external source but is something innate in Palamas' own thinking from a very early period.

The key words mentioned above occur both in simple and compound forms in about equal proportions. Palamas might be compared to Aeschylus and Kazantzakis as a coiner of 'towering words' and nowhere is this feature of Palamas' language more impressively demonstrated than in his use of compound forms on the circle theme like φλογοστεφάνωτη,¹¹

7. In a poem titled *Emerson, Poe, Whitman* (vol. IX, p. 217) Palamas refers to Whitman as τῆς λύρας δὲ Νιάγρας. A comparison of Whitman's *Song of Myself* with *The Dodecalogue of the Gypsy* does raise some interesting questions about the possibility of Whitman's influence on the free-verse structure and the 'torrential' flow of ideas in the Greek poem.

8. Th. Maskaleris, *Kostis Palamas* (New York, 1972), p. 129.

9. *Ἄπαντα*, vol. XI, pp. 269–300, as well as the Prologue to this collection.

10. Ibid., vol. X, pp. 85–6 and elsewhere in the criticisms.

11. *Καημοὶ τῆς Αιμοθάλασσας*, *Ἄπαντα*, vol. V, p. 179.

φωτοστεφάνωμα,¹² φεγγαρόβρυση,¹³ φωτοκύκλωτη,¹¹ παγοστεφάνωτες,¹⁵ δακτυλιδοστεφάνωτο and φεγγαροφωτοπλούμιστη,¹⁶ etc. (though we should certainly not take the length of such compound forms as an infallible indicator of literary merit!).

Palamas' use of 'circle' images ranges from simple, graphic description of some physical aspect of person or thing, such as we have in poems like *Γυρισμός* and '*Η Ψαροπούλα*,¹⁷ to complex and highly subtle allusion on a metaphysical theme, of the kind we find in *Φοινικιά*. We can see the same broadly delineated chronological stages in the development of his treatment of these images as is evident in other features of his style. In the poems before about 1896 images involving the words *ἥλιος*, φεγγάρι, στεφάνι, κορώνα and δακτυλίδι occur frequently and their symbolism is almost always explicit and unsophisticated; 'angelic sacrifices' which are *ἀκάνθινα στεφάνια*,¹⁸ the Parthenon which *φοροῦσε κορώνα τὴν καταχνιά*,¹⁹ the sun which is *τοῦ Ἀπείρου κορώνα*,²⁰ τὸ δακτυλίδι *τοῦ ἀρραβώνα*²¹ and so on. As we should expect, in the poems written between 1897 and 1906, the years of greatest intellectual maturity and most intense spiritual conflict, his treatment of 'circle' images exhibits the subtlety and artistic mastery of language and metre that is the hallmark of mature poetic genius. While he never really returns to the unsophisticated symbolism of his early period, after about 1906 his use of images on the 'circle' theme, although not declining in frequency, does, with few exceptions, exhibit less and less the lyric power and intellectual subtlety that characterize the masterpieces of his middle period. Indeed, the finest poems of Palamas' late period are probably among those in which no image of this sort occurs

12. *Ύμνος τῶν Ἀντρείων*, vol. III, p. 179.
13. *Τραγούδι τοῦ Γάμου*, vol. V, pp. 215–16.
14. *Χαιρετισμοὶ τῆς Ἡλιογέννητης*, vol. III, p. 259.
15. *Χαιρετισμοὶ τῆς Ἡλιογέννητης*, vol. III, p. 275.
16. *Μίδι Βραβίδα σ' ἔνα Σπίτι*, vol. VII, pp. 142–4.
17. *Καημοὶ τῆς Λιμνοθάλασσας*, vol. V, pp. 178 and 179.
18. *Τὰ Δῶρα τῆς Ψυχῆς*, vol. I, p. 132.
19. *Ἴαμψοι καὶ Ἀνάπαιστοι* 39, vol. I, p. 369.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 367.
21. *Τὰ Μάτια τῆς Ψυχῆς μου*, vol. I, p. 264.

at all, poems such as '*Ο Σάτυρας*'²² and '*Ο κύκνος πρὸς τὴν Λήδα*'.²³

στεφάνι, στέμμα, κορώνα

The 'crown/coronet' image is the most frequently occurring of the 'circle' images in Palamas' poetry. It is used to express aspects of themes dominant in the poet's emotional and intellectual life. These are: the power of female sexuality, glory of the race and the self, the striving towards an ideal in which a vision of perfection is realized in the spiritual and intellectual transcendence of the conflict of human emotions. Outside the range of these themes this image occurs only occasionally as in '*Έκατον Φωνές*', 17, where the poet celebrates the coming of spring to Athens.

On the theme of female sexuality the image occurs occasionally as a symbol of joy remembered as in '*Αγάπη μου, Θυμᾶσαι*',²⁴ where *τὰ στέφανα τοῦ γάμου* serve to recall the joys of early days of marriages. In the majority of instances, however, it is associated with episodes of traumatic disillusionment and despair. Despair and disillusionment with love are inseparable in Palamas' poetry from his pathological *γυναικολατρεία*²⁵ and so we get the frequent recurrence of the 'crown' image in motifs suggestive of Woman as a daemonic figure, bewitching the male, draining him of all will and thus destroying him spiritually in some degree. Sometimes she is a nymph, the *νεράϊδα*²⁶ of Greek folk-lore who enchants men to their destruction (*Τὸ Δακτυλίδι*, where the *νεράϊδα* is the personified female creative principle and so life itself seen as a destructive enchantress): very often she is a girl or woman endowed with attributes suggestive of the *νεράϊδα* as in '*Η Ψαροπούλα*'.²⁷

*Στρογγυλοφέγγαρη ψαροπούλα,
ποιά ροδοσάρκα σὰν τὴ δικῆ σου,
σὰν τὴν τρεμούλα σου ποιά τρεμούλα;
Πῶς τὸ λαχτάρισα τὸ κορμί σου!*

22. *Πολιτεία καὶ Μοναξία*, *Ἀπαντά*, vol. V, pp. 418–21.

23. *Δειλοί καὶ Σκληροί Στίχοι*, *Ἀπαντά*, vol. IX, pp. 184–6.

24. *Πολιτεία καὶ Μοναξία*, *Ἀπαντά*, vol. V, p. 372.

25. Discussed extensively by Dhoxas, op. cit.

26. For a discussion of Palamas' excursions into the *νεραϊδόκοσμος* see Tsatsos, pp. 38–9.

27. See note 11.

*Φλογοστεφάνωτη, ἀνεμοπόδα,
στοὺς μώλους ἔτρεχες καὶ στ' ἀλώνια,
τ' ἀπρίλη ἐσ' εἰσουν δλα τὰ ρόδα,
κι δλα τῆς νιότης τὰ καταφρόνια.*

and again in *'Ασκραῖος*²⁸ Pandora is a creature *ξωτικό* with hair that *δλο ἄνθια τὰ στεφάνωναν* and who wears a *χρυσὴ κορώνα* of living *ζώδια* *καὶ θηριά*. This image finds perhaps its most lyrically beautiful expression as a symbol of the daemonic power of female sexuality in the magnificent description of the gypsy-woman in Canto 3 of the *Dodecalogue of the Gypsy*,²⁹ a canto appropriately titled *'Αγάπη*:

*Περδικόστηθη Τσιγγάνα,
ῳ μαγεύτρα, ποὺ μιλεῖς
τὰ μεσάνυχτα πρὸς τ' ἀστρα
γλῶσσα προσταγῆς,

πού μιλώντας γιγαντεύεις
καὶ τοὺς κόσμους ζεπερνᾶς
καὶ τ' ἀστέρια σοῦ φοροῦνε
μιὰ κορώνα ξωτικιᾶς!

Σφίξε γύρω μου τὴ ζώνη
τῶν ἀντρίκειω σου χεριῶν.
είμαι δ μάγος τῆς ἀγάπης,
μάγισσα τῶν ἀστεριῶν.*

Here we have also the *ζώνη ἀγκαλιᾶς* as an image of encirclement that translates the mystical image of enchantress ‘crowned with witchery’ into one of sexual passion. The gypsy-woman does not lead the Gypsy-poet to the realization of his vision of a more perfectly created humanity, instead he finds in her embrace only

*τῆς γυναικας τὴν ἀπάτη
καὶ τῆς σάρκας τὴ σκλαβιά.*

In a number of poems the poet consciously externalizes in reflective monologue the conflict of his desire to idealize woman

²⁸. *Ασάλευτη Ζωή, Απαντα*, vol. III, pp. 212–13.

²⁹. *Απαντα*, vol. III, pp. 332–4.

with his desire to ravish her. Palamas himself has much to say on this subject in the various papers that constitute his memoirs.³⁰ The crown as a symbol of divine spirituality in physical beauty, a sort of Beatricean symbol,³¹ often appears in poems of this sort as in *Παθητικὸς Ὑμνος* where he addresses the *Χρυσομαλλούσα* as a creature of witchery and at the same time of divine serenity and spiritual inspiration. The poet is torn between the desire to worship and to fashion for his vision of beauty

—κι ἀπὸ ποιὸ μέταλλο; —στὰ χρυσά σου
μαλλιά στεφάνι.³²

and his compulsion to violate that serenity

*Μὲ δργὴ εἴπα τότε καὶ δρμὴ Σατύρου
ν ἀκλώσω ἀπάνου σου ἀθέλητά σου
καὶ νὰ ζεστάνω τὰ κρύα μου τὰ χέρια
στὰ γόνατά σου.*

*Ἡ, ἀκόμ' ἀδιάντροπα, μὲ τὴ φόρα
τοῦ ποὺ ἀγριεμένα χύνεται χτήνους
τοὺς ἀκατάδεχτους νὰ πατήσω
κομμένους κρίνους:*

The theme of glory is obviously one in which we might expect the image of the crown as the victor's award for supreme achievement to figure fairly prominently. In Palamas' poetry glory is either for the poet himself or for the race and sometimes, as in *Ἀσκραῖος*, the poet himself is an instrument for the greater glory of the race, so that the glory of the one becomes the glory of the other. The recognition of glory achieved and the vision of glory to be striven for is most often symbolized by the 'crown/coronet' image as in *Μισολόγγι*³³ (a poem written in

30. Particularly *Τὰ Χρόνια μου καὶ τὰ χαρτιά μου*, *Ἄπαντα*, vol. IV and *Ἡ Ποιητικὴ μου*, vol. X, but revealing comments are also scattered throughout the remaining papers and in prologues to the various collections of poems.

31. Dante's Beatrice also figures in Palamas' analysis of his sexuality and his art and almost all of his idealized images of woman have a Beatrice quality about them.

32. *Ἄπαντα*, vol. IX, p. 196–7.

33. *Ἄπαντα*, vol. V, P. 465.

1910 for the yearly celebration of the exodus from Misolonghi), *'Οι Πατέρες*³⁴ and other poems in the collections *Bωμός* and *Παράκαιρα, Πολιτεία*³⁵ (where the poet is addressed by the Muse as *δαφνοστέφανος*, etc.) and of course the ‘national epic’, *The King’s Flute*, in which *στεφάνι, στέμμα, κορώνα* plus a rich variety of adjectival compounds on these are scattered along the panoramic progress of Byzantine emperors and empresses through the pages of Palamas’ encomium to the triumph of the Greeks as a warrior race.

Themes of spiritual and cultural attainment in which a vision of some universal ideal with a moral as well as an intellectual content is dominant are common in the poetry of Palamas’ middle period, and here the ‘crown’ image is often a key image closely associated with the dominant ideas of the theme and tends to be developed with greater complexity and subtlety than in poems on more emotional and tangible themes. Such examples of its use are to be found in the *Hymn to Athens, Greetings to the Sunborn, The Dodecalogue of the Gypsy, The Chains and The Palm Tree*³⁶ and some of the shorter poems such as the *Hymn of the Earth*³⁷ and other poems of the *Ασάλευτη Ζωή*.

All these key words and their various compounds are interchangeable in the sense that the poet’s use of them seems to be determined in each instance rather by aesthetic purpose than by thematic reasons. In many cases one form or another seems clearly to have been preferred for metrical reasons or in order to evoke specific visual effects in the imagery. Particularly interesting is the frequency of the occurrence of the ‘crown’ image in association with the figure of the king or queen (more rarely the princess) in Palamas’ poetry. Indeed the king/queen figure is present in a great number of the poems of his early and middle periods and is always endowed with an aura of supernatural power. Clearly enough in some of the early poems such as *Στέκει τὸ Βασιλόπουλο*³⁸ and *Νανούρισμα*³⁹ this figure is derived from medieval Greek folklore, but instead of being

34. *Ἀπαντά*, vol. VII, pp. 22–9.

35. *Ἀπαντά*, vol. V, pp. 291–301.

36. Discussed separately below.

37. *Πολιτεία καὶ Μοναχία*, vol. V, pp. 384–5.

38. *Ταμβοὶ καὶ Ανάπαιστοι*, vol. I, p. 350.

39. Vol. I, pp. 32–4.

restricted to the earlier, rather unsophisticated poems cast in a 'folkloric' style, it persists with all its associations of divinely endowed glory and power into much of the most mature poetry of Palamas. The 'king' figure is usually identified with 'warrior-cult' aspects of the Greek tradition, the most notable example being the epic of *The King's Flute*. The 'queen' or 'princess' figure often features as a personification of cultural ideals associated with the destiny of the Greek race, a personification of what we might call Palamas' conception of the *ἀρετή* of Hellenism and perhaps the best example of this is his *Χαιρετισμοὶ τῆς Ἡλιογέννητης*, a poem on a cultural theme, basically ethnic in its implications, but with universal overtones, a poem inspired by folk-song in which this sunborn personification of all that is beautiful and noble is both *χωριατοπούλα* and *βασίλισσα*, the *χρυσοπηγὴ/τῶν ἀντίδων ὅλων καὶ τῶν μύρων/θρησκεία τῶν ὁραμάτων/καὶ ἀρμονία τῶν θείων δνείρων*, who is perceived by the poet as a mystical manifestation of the Spirit and the Word.⁴⁰

δαχτυλίδι

The ring (*δαχτυλίδι*) is a symbol of peculiar significance in the development of Palamas' personality and consequently of his art. As a poetic image it does not occur as frequently in the poems as the 'crown/coronet' image, but where it does occur it tends, too, to have associations with ideas of daemonic power. Occasionally, as in *Tὸ Δαχτυλίδι τοῦ Ἀρραβώνα*,⁴¹ *Ἀνατολή*¹² and *τὰ Δαχτυλίδια*⁴³ the ring is an explicit symbol of a direct and simple emotional experience of a joyous and/or satisfying nature. In certain poems, such as *Tὸ Δαχτυλίδι*,⁴⁴ *τὸ Σχολεῖον*,⁴⁵ '*Ἡ μάρη Λάμια*'⁴⁶ and '*Ο Δωδεκάλογος τοῦ Γύφτου*', it is a symbol of complex and far-reaching psychological and/or intellectual

40. *Ἀπαντά*, vol. III, pp. 253–83.

41. Ibid., vol. I, pp. 264–6.

42. Ibid., vol. V, pp. 217–18.

43. Ibid., vol. VII, pp. 195–6.

44. Ibid., vol. III, pp. 48–9. See also above. Maskaleris (op. cit., p. 13) rightly says that this poem 'is of key significance in understanding Palamas' psychology, certain fundamental aspects of his life and poetry'.

45. *Ἀπαντά*, vol. I, pp. 122–5.

46. *Ἀπαντά*, vol. I, p. 350.

implications. In the first three of these last-mentioned poems the ring is symbolically identified with the earring (*σκουλαρίκι*) he was made to wear as a child as a charm against Charos and the Evil Eye, and so by implication it symbolizes also the first years of his orphanage with its attendant misery and indelible psychological trauma.⁴⁷ So the ‘ring’ image is polysymbolic: it is the *token* of daemonic power over the innocent soul; it is the *magical bond* which binds the child to life itself and imprisons him within a wounding, oppressive world of emotion and circumstance partly conditional by the very actuality of the earring as an inseparable feature of his existence and thus it is also a *stigma* (*κακοσημάδευμα*) which sets him apart from, and makes him become rejected by, his peers. Long after the accidental loss of the ring Palamas carried the consciousness of it into his adulthood as the symbol and source of his whole ‘dislocated condition’.⁴⁸ In 1897, in a moment of black despair and self-doubt, he gave expression to all this in *Tὸ Δαχτυλῖδι*. The poem almost shockingly reveals the intensity of Palamas’ pathological horror for what he considered to be a curse wrought by his mother upon his destiny. He regarded her action—born of desperation in superstition—as being in effect a curse upon his life, achieving a kind of hideous reverse effect upon his destiny from that which was intended. The ritual of the earring’s fashioning was intended to save the child from Death’s clutches and bind him magically to Life, but Life itself becomes for him an inexorable force of evil enchantment. She is the original nereid, the magical manifestation of daemonic power for the destruction of the human soul: she promises ecstasy and fulfilment, she is the ‘first-born flower of faith and beauty’, loved with passion and longing by the child imprisoned within the golden bond of her power:

‘Η μάννα μου βουλήθηκε νὰ μὲ παντρέψῃ,
νὰ μοὺ διαλέξῃ γιὰ γυναίκα μιὰ νεράιδα,
τῆς πίστης καὶ τῆς δύορφιᾶς πρωτόβγαλτο ἀνθος.

47. For the events of Palamas’ childhood and their later significance I recommend Maskaleris (in English), Tsatsos and Dhoxas, op. cit., and particularly the poet’s own account contained in *Τὰ Χρόνια μου καὶ τὰ χαρτιά μου*, loc. cit.

48. The words are P. Sherrard’s, *The Marble Threshing Floor*, Introduction, p. 4.

Μὲ σένα ἡ μάννα βάλθηκε νὰ μὲ παντρέψῃ,
 ὁ ξωτικιὰ Ζωὴ καὶ στὶς νεράϊδες πρώτη!
 Καὶ τρέχει καὶ ρωτάει καὶ πάει καὶ παίρνει γνώμη
 ἀπὸ τὶς πρωτομάγισσες κι ἀπ’ τὶς ξορκίστρες,
 ἀπὸ σαράντα πρωτοστέφανες νυφάδες
 χρυσάφι διακονεύει, κι ἀπὸ τὸ χρυσάφι
 τὸ μαγεμένο δαχτυλίδι μαστορεύει,
 μοῦ τὸ φορεῖ, καὶ μὲ τὴ χάρη τὴν κρυφή του
 μοῦ χρυσοδένει τὴν παιδιάτικη τὴ σάρκα,
 τ’ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τῆς ξωτικιᾶς ὃ τί ἀρραβώνα!
 Κ’ ἔγώ εἰμον τὸ παιδί ποὺ μεγάλωνε πάντα
 μὲ τὴ μεθύστρα δρμὴ τῶν ἀρραβωνιασμένων
 ποὺ ζανοίγουν τὸ γάμο πλανευτοὶ ἀπ’ τὸν πόθο,
 ἀτέλειωτη γιορτὴ σὲ κάτασπρο κρεββάτι.
 Κ’ ἔγώ εἰμον τὸ παιδί ποὺ μεγάλωνε πάντα
 χρυσοδετὸ μὲ τὴ Ζωὴ τὴν ἀντρειωμένη,
 κ’ ἔγώ εἰμον τὸ παιδί ποὺ μεγάλωνε πάντα
 μὲ τῆς Ζωῆς τὸν ἔρωτα καὶ μὲ τὴ δίψα,

The poem contains biographical facts as well as the poet's nightmare vision of his destiny. Lines 6–12 recount the actual requirements of the ritual (which his mother seems to have followed to the best of her ability) for the fashioning of the earring to be hung in the left ear of the endangered child. Lines 31–8 allude to the occasion on which the ring was lost.⁴⁹ The historical occasion becomes symbolical of his destiny here: it is from this point of time linked with this event, that the poet traces his realization of the horror, the 'something terrifying and dumb' to which he is now irrevocably bound within himself and which paralyses his will, denying him all that is bright and joyous in life, turning him inward towards a distorted vision of himself full of blackness and impotent despair.

Μὰ μιὰ φορὰ—ἀπὸ ποῦ καὶ πῶς, δὲν τὸ γνωρίζω—
 σ’ ἀμμοστρωμένη ἀκρογιαλιὰ ἥλιοφλογισμένη,

49. For Palamas' own analysis of the psychological significance of the whole circumstance of the ring see *Xρον. κ. Χαρ.*, op. cit., pp. 323–7. Other comments and allusions occur elsewhere in the *Ἄπαντα*. See also Dhoxas, pp. 18–36, and Maskaleris, chap. 1.

μιὰν ὥρα θλιβερὴ βραδιοῦ συγνεφιασμένου,
 πάλεψα μ' ἔνα νιόφερτο ζένο ἀραπάκι
 βγαλμένο σὰν ἀπὸ τῆς θάλασσας τὰ σπλάχνα,
 καὶ μέσα κεῖ στοῦ παλεμοῦ τὸ δλάγριο πεῖσμα
 πέφτει καὶ χάνεται καὶ πάει τὸ δαχτυλίδι.
 Ἡ γῆ τὸ ρούφηξ; Τὸ κῦμα τὸ κατάπιε;
 Δὲν ξέρω· ξέρω μοναχὰ πὼς ἀπὸ τότε
 τὰ ξορκολόγια λύθηκαν, τὰ μάγια φύγαν,
 κ' ἡ ζωτικιὰ ἡ Ζωὴ καὶ στίς νεράϊδες πρώτη
 κ' ἡ ἀρραβωνιαστικιὰ καὶ ἡ δέσποινα κ' ἡ σκλάβα
 γίνηκε τοῦ καπνοῦ καπνὸς καὶ πάει καὶ κείνη.
 Ὡ! κι ἀπὸ τότε μ' ἔδεσε ἀπ' τὰ πρῶτα χρόνια
 ὡς τοῦ Καιροῦ τὸ ἀργοχιονίσματα τὰ πρῶτα
 στὸ μαῦρο δάσος τῶν μαλλιῶν, ὃ καὶ ἀπὸ τότε
 μ' ἔδεσε κάτι φοβερὸ καὶ βουβὸ κάτι
 μὲ κάποιον ἵσκιο ἀγνώριστο, παραδαρμένο,
 ποὺ λὲς πώς δὲν ὑπάρχει καὶ ποὺ λὲς πώς δλο
 νὰ ὑπάρξῃ πολεμάει, καὶ δὲν τὸ κατορθώνει.
 κι δ μαῦρος χωρισμένος τῆς Ζωῆς ἐγώ εἰμαι,
 ἐγώ εἴμαι τῆς Ζωῆς ὁ ἀνήμπτορος ὁ μέγας!
 Καὶ τοῦ ἀρχαίου τοῦ Ρήγα ἡ κόρη ἡ Ἀλκιθόη,
 σημάδι τῆς θεϊκῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐκδικήτρας,
 ἀλλαξε πλάση κ' ἔγινε, ωἱμένα, ωἱμένα
 ἀπὸ κυρά βασιλοπούλα, νυχτερίδα.

Orphanage is a theme woven into a great deal of Palamas' poetry and wherever the image of the ring is associated with this theme it is the symbol of the poet's conception of his fated and fateful betrothal to the feminine life-force, a daemonic force of which Woman is somehow a manifestation, containing within herself the promise of Man's highest creative fulfilment and the potential for his utter destruction.

These are the negative, dark aspects of the ring's symbolism, the aspects most frequently met with in Palamas' poetry. There is, however, another positive aspect that emerges in the most mature masterpieces and is most specifically expressed in the *Dodecalogue of the Gypsy*. Palamas himself says about the earring that, strangely linked with his fate, it was a σύμβολο μυστηριακό, ἔδειχνε τὸ δρόμο ποὺ θὰ ἐπρεπε νὰ πάρη ἡ βούλησή μου.⁵⁰ The

50. *Xρον. κ. Χαρ.*, op. cit., p. 325.

ring which has set him apart, *κακοσημαδεμένος*, will become the means of his deliverance from his own demon and so an instrument of his achievement of his goal through the art of his verse. His demon, the *ζένο ἀραπάκι* of *Tὸ Δαχτυλίδι*, who reappears as the *ἀράπης/φύλακας* of the *'Αλυσίδες*, will itself point the way to the poet's final reconciliation of his own conflict in his realization of his own creative role as artist, as Hellene and as universal man. In the *Dodecalogue*, where the image is a key one in association with the socialistically oriented philosophy of the theme, he speaks of his power to bind

—καὶ τὸ Λόγο,
δαιμονα καὶ ζωτικό,
στὸ χρυσὸ δὸ δαχτυλίδι
στὸ Ρυθμό.⁵¹

And he seeks of the gypsy-woman crowned with that other mystical circlet of the stars, the knowledge with which to bind the daemonic world

πῶς, ὑπάκουους τοὺς δαιμόνους
τοὺς λαοὺς τῶν ζωτικῶν,
στοὺς χρυσοὺς νὰ δένω γύρους
τῶν δαχτυλιδιῶν,

. . . .
πῶς μὲ βούλλα σολομώντεια
νὰ σφραγίζω καὶ νὰ κλειῶ
τὰ μεγάλα τὰ τελώνια
σὲ γναλὶ στενό.

In Canto 2⁵² the ring becomes the pledge of the Gypsy-prophet to society in the most profoundly socialistic sense. He commands his soul

Σβῆσε κάθε σου ξεχώρισμα,
ρίχ' τὸ δαχτυλίδι σου ἀρραβώνα

51. *'Απαντα*, vol. III, p. 330 (Canto 3).

52. The canto in which the ideas he derived from the socialist philosophies of the time (and also from Solomos and possibly from a direct acquaintance with Plato's *Republic*) are most forcefully and explicitly expressed.

μέσα στὸ κανάλι τοῦ λαοῦ.
ἔνας γίνε ἀπὸ τοὺς στύλους τοὺς ἀμέτρητους
τοῦ μεγάλου ἔργου τοῦ συντροφικοῦ.⁵³

In Canto 10, titled Resurrection, the mystical gypsy-woman reappears and at this point the images of crown and ring become one, in terms of their significance as symbols of a universally creative ethic, in the all-embracing image of the circle (*κύκλος*) which occurs in a ‘cyclic’ context in this canto and recurs in Canto 12 only once explicitly of the universal Earth mother

—ἡ Γῆ τρέχει μὲ τὶς ὥρες.
μέσ' στοὺς κύκλους, μέσ' στοὺς δρόμους,
καὶ χορεύει τὸν ἀστέρινο
τὸ χορδῆστοχαστική,

but is implicit in the whole development of idea in this canto in which the music of Man’s creative mind brings all things into a harmony of spirit with nature.

'Η Φοινικιά'

In this poem, one of the finest masterpieces of modern lyric poetry, we see the image of the ring transformed to become one, in an aesthetic sense, with the image of the crown which is endowed by allusion with certain of the psychological connotations clearly recognizable to us from elsewhere in the work of Palamas. However, before we can productively move to an analysis of the imagery of the *Φοινικιά*, the question of possible external influences on the ideas and structure (and consequently on the imagery) of the poem ought to be briefly dealt with.

First, the possible influence of Shelley’s *The Sensitive Plant*. The fairly striking similarities in setting and structural development of idea in both these poems has been remarked on before this.⁵⁴ Although, as Maskaleris fairly points out, ‘the final direction of thought in each shows their essential difference’,⁵⁵ there is no

53. Vol. III, p. 316.

54. For a summing up of the external influences on this and other poems of Palamas see Maskaleris (*op. cit.*), chaps. 2 and 6.

55. Maskaleris, p. 35. The italics are mine.

getting away from the remarkable parallel of the structural development of the theme in both poems. In both, the setting is the garden of Creation, abundant and fecund with an infinite variety of forms; in both the aspect of the garden changes, moving through phases of joyous creativity, destructiveness, corruption and decay to rebirth; in both the human soul is personified by a lowly, botanically unspectacular, 'sensitive' plant-form. There are a host of other similarities—suggested rather than explicit—in the nature symbolism of both poems. Does *The Palm Tree* of Palamas in fact owe anything in terms of idea, structure and imagery to Shelley's poem? Leandros Palamas, the poet's son, refers to the acquaintance of Palamas with Shelley's poem through the French historian Taine.⁵⁶ Indeed the poet's admiration for Shelley's work is a frequent subject for comment by Palamas himself in the prolific prose papers of the *Works* (*Ἄπαντα*). While confessing the necessity to read Shelley in translation, he frequently discusses the content and style of the English poet in a manner that suggests strongly that he had not only 'read about' Shelley's poems but had actually read the texts of the poems themselves in translation. His discussion of Shelley's drama *Hellas* is a case in point⁵⁷ as are his remarks on *Epipsychedion* and other poems. Unless I am mistaken, however, he nowhere mentions *The Sensitive Plant*. This fact in itself neither confirms nor denies his acquaintance with the actual text of the poem. An artist most conscious of his own poetic and intellectual 'identity', he may purposely have omitted discussion of this particular poem so as to avoid drawing undue attention to a consciously acquired debt to Shelley's technique in this instance. Certainly, after any close reading of the two poems, it is difficult to accept that Palamas' acquaintance with *The Sensitive Plant* was as tenuous as that suggested by Leandros Palamas and Maskaleris, or as non-existent as the omission of any mention of it from Palamas' own writings suggests. On the other hand, whatever the debt to

56. L. Palamas, *A Study on the Palm Tree of Kostes Palamas*, trans. Th. Stephanides and G. Katsonbalis (Athens, 1931). Unfortunately I do not at the present moment have access to this work and my comments here are drawn from notes taken from it some years ago in Oxford and from references to it in Maskaleris, loc. cit.

57. *Ἄπαντα*, vol. XV, pp. 410–15.

Shelley's technique and ideas, Palamas' *Φοινικιά* stands as a lyrical masterpiece in its own right. So far as the symbolism of the poem is concerned, there is clearly no borrowing of the 'circle' image from Shelley's poem. Its occurrence in the *Φοινικιά* is a natural expression of Palamas' own inherent attraction to images of a circular and cyclic type.

I have already mentioned the poet's own comment on what he calls his 'cyclic mania'.⁵⁸ In the context of these remarks he talks about *τρόπους ποὺ συχνὰ ἐμφανίζονται καὶ ποὺ χαρακτηρίζουν τὴ διανοητικὴ ἐργασία μον* and he goes on to say *Σὰν τί νὰ είναι αὐτοί οἱ τρόποι; Πρῶτα: ἡ κυκλικὴ μορφὴ μὲ τὴν όποια συλλαμβάνω τὴν ιδέα.*⁵⁹ We can see it as a natural consequence, then, that the external philosophical influences on the ideas of the poem should find expression in images sometimes explicitly circular, at other times even more subtly suggestive by oblique allusion. External philosophical influences are clearly discernible in the treatment of the theme; the evolutionary interpretation of Man's role in the cycle of Creation with its ethical overtones reflects the impact on Palamas' thinking, particularly of the English philosopher Spencer, as well as of Darwin, Nietzsche and (probably to a lesser extent here than elsewhere) of the socialist philosophies of the time such as those of Marx and Engels.⁶⁰

When Palamas talks in his Poetics⁶¹ about certain of his poems, including *Φοινικιά*, being expressions of the 'lyricism of all things' (*δὲ λυρισμὸς τῶν δλων*); when he talks of his attempts to harmonize within his poetry two seemingly antithetical philosophical views of existence, positivism and idealism with their conflicting emphases on the empirical and the metaphysical, he is telling us something about his own attitude to the dilemma they pose and something about his own position as an artist within the larger conflict. He talks about monism and pluralism⁶² and the problem of philosophical and artistic

58. See note 5.

59. Op. cit., p. 552.

60. The impact of Spencer on Palamas' philosophical ideas is clearly acknowledged in the poet's comments contained in the collection *Πεζοὶ Δρόμοι* (vol. X, pp. 85, 89, 92, 114, 119 and elsewhere). Likewise we find clear acknowledgements of the influence of the other thinkers mentioned above scattered throughout the *Ἀπαντα*.

61. Vol. X, pp. 517–30.

62. *Πεζοὶ Δρόμοι*, *Ἀπαντα*, vol. X, p. 132.

reconciliation of these views and about the whole problem of the 'two cultures', Art and Science.⁶³

'Man the individual is nothing; Mankind is everything' he says⁶⁴ and I do not believe, as Maskaleris does, that this is a 'surprising statement' which 'may be considered an explosion of momentary enthusiasm showing the sweeping influence of Renan'.⁶⁵ On the contrary, I see it as a fundamental statement of Palamas' mature view of the ethical and intellectual dilemma and of his own individual position within that dilemma. He is simply saying after all that Man the individual is inseparable from Mankind and that the existence of the individual is meaningful only in terms of the individual's relating of himself to the ongoing whole of humanity. Such a concept of Man and humanity is no more original to Renan than it is to Palamas, but it can be seen manifestly expressed in many of Palamas' finest poems as a conceptual cornerstone in the architecture of his ideas. The outstanding example is of course the *Dodecalogue of the Gypsy*, where perhaps its most socialistically explicit expression is associated with the image of the ring in Canto 2.⁶⁶ Here also, in *The Palm Tree*, this concept of Man determines the 'final direction of thought', associated with what we might call a crowning image of encirclement. Only within the framework of such a concept as this can the poet reconcile the divided and warring self, the even more terrible conflict of the individual, suffering soul with the implacability of the ineluctable life process.

Palamas himself saw the *Palm Tree* as part of a lyric trilogy;⁶⁷ nevertheless the *Palm Tree* stands as a masterpiece in its own right and can be seen as a unity in itself, both from a thematic and an artistic point of view.

*Μονισμός, πλουραλισμός . . .*⁶⁸ Δὲν ὑπάρχει κόσμος, ὑπάρχουν κόσμοι καὶ κοσμάκηδες, ἀδιάκοπη κίνηση, ἀλλαγή, ξάπλωμα, στένωμα, ζετύλιμα, πισοδρόμισμα . . .⁶⁹ the infinite processes of

63. 'Η ποιητικὴ μον., Ἀπαντά, vol. X, pp. 413–573 and elsewhere in the *Ἀπαντά*.

64. Vol. X, p. 157.

65. Maskaleris, op. cit., p. 133.

66. See above, τὸ δαχτυλίδι.

67. . . . ἡ «Φοινικά», οἱ «Ἐκατό Φωνές» καὶ δ «Ασκραῖος» καὶ τὰ τρία αὐτὰ τῆς «Ἀσάλευτης Ζωῆς» εἰναι μιὰ λυρικὴ τριλογία, vol. X, p. 523.

68. Vol. X, p. 132.

69. Ibid., p. 437.

change and aspects of growth that give us Creation's garden, in the midst of which the palm tree, monistic, reaches ever upward and beyond the earthbound life-forms that surround it. The palm tree is in some sense also *τὸ ἴδανικό . . . πραγματικότης πιὸ μεγάλη ἀπὸ μιὰ ψηλὴ κορφήν . . .*⁷⁰ the 'ideal', monistic in essence, arising from and nourished by the pluralism of the life processes going on at her roots. Of course the *φοινικά* is a polysymbolic image whose 'idealistic' aspect reflects only one thread of the poet's theme here, but it is an aspect of the symbolism directly related to Palamas' use of the 'circle' image.

'*Ο στίχος μου, γενικώτατα . . . φέρνεται σ' ἔνα τριπλὸν παρονοήσαμα: θετικό, ἀντθετικό, συνθετικό.*'⁷¹ I think no clearer example of this structural canon of thesis, antithesis and synthesis can be found in Palamas' poetry, and such a structure lends itself naturally to the cyclic nature of the theme which itself finds perfect harmony of expression in the subtle use of both explicit and suggested 'circle' images.

The visual impression of encirclement is suggested in the first lines of the introductory heading to the poem:

*Μέσα σ' ἔνα περιβόλι, γώρω στὸν ἵσκιο
μιᾶς φοινικιᾶς, κάποια γαλανὰ λουλούδια, . . .*⁷²

The small blue flowers rooted *ἀσάλευτα* within the shade of the tall trees are an earthbound garland encircling the base of the tree's trunk, and so by implication suggesting to the reader the further visual impression of the straight round bole of the tree rising with single, symmetrical grace to the crown of fronds high above the encircling flowers beneath it. In the first stanza the question is posed about the existence of a divine order in the phenomena of creation and therefore of purpose in the existence of man within the scheme of creation. The palm tree is addressed in terms that immediately endow it with suggestions of demonic power:

*Ταχ' ἀπὸ χαλαστὴ γιὰ ταχ' ἀπὸ σωτῆρα;
Νά μας ἀσάλευτα στὸν ἵσκιο σου ἀποκάτου.
ὅ ἵσκιος σου εἶναι τῆς ζωῆς ἡ τοῦ θανάτου;*

70. Ibid., p. 416. 71. Ibid., p. 550.

72. *Ἄπαντα*, vol. III, p. 129.

Whatever else she becomes, at this point the palm tree is already established as a personification of a life principle, ineluctable and supernatural, bearing within herself both creative and destructive powers over the life forms that exist within her shade. In stanza 2 the visual impression of the cylindrical trunk of the tree rising to its crown of drooping fronds is subtly kept before us with the allusion to the

τρικυμιστὴ μόνο ή κορφή σου . . .

which in stanza 3 becomes, by transference of its power through the showering raindrops, a ‘coronet of coolness’ for all the other life-forms that receive it, but for the soul-flowers at its base a blighting force of sickness and death

*δλων κορώνα τους φορεῖ τὸ δροσοβόλι,
δλα τὸ γάργαρο νερὸ τὰ μπαλσαμώνει.
γιατί σ' ἐμᾶς ή θεία τῶν δλων καλωσύνη
γίνεται λάβωμα κι' ἀρρώστια καὶ καμίνι;*⁷³

In stanza 4 the ‘crown’ image of the palm tree’s waving fronds is made explicit and is explicitly associated with the idea of demonic power over mankind:

*τὸ στέμμα σου οὐρανὸς μὲ τ' ἄστρα· ὁ οὐρανός μας.
Θεὸς ἀλύπητος ἀν εἴσαι, φανερώσουν.
Ἄν δχι, γνέψε μας, καὶ μιὰ γαλήνη δός μας.*

The visual impression of the tree as interrelated symmetrical images of circular trunk and crown is now clearly delineated and complete in its physical aspect. We carry it forward clearly imprinted on our minds through the following eleven stanzas in which the blue flowers reflect upon their relationship with the palm tree and with all the infinitely varied life-forms around them. In the course of this brilliant descriptive passage, pulsing with life and colour, the blue flowers become explicitly identifiable as the personification of introspective human souls and the poet’s soul in particular:

73. Ibid., p. 130, ll. 5–8.

τὰ μάτια εἴμαστ’ ἐμεῖς, εἴμαστ’ ἐμεῖς τὰ μάτια

*Ποιᾶς φυλακῆς νᾶμαστ’ ἐμεῖς τὰ συγγενάδια;
Ὕρθε καὶ κλείστη μέσα μας,—ποιὸς νὰ πιστέψῃ!
μιὰ κολασμένη καὶ μιὰ θεία· ή Σκέψη, ή Σκέψη!*⁷⁴

In stanzas 11–15 the whole range of sensual attributes in nature is felt by the soul flowers and the focus is temporarily shifted from the palm tree itself to the life-forms and elements which surround it. In stanza 16 these are related to the poet's vision of the palm tree which at this point becomes explicitly woman-like (not merely feminine) and regal in its aspect, adorned by a corona of emerald and silver light, symbol of its divine power

*Λαμποκοπάει τῆς βασιλεῖας σου σημάδι
κορώνα ἀχτίδων ἀπὸ σμάραγδα κι ἀσήμια
κρεμάμενη, τρεμάμενη ἀπὸ τὴν κορφή σου.
ὦ τί ρυθμὸς ποὺ κυβερνάει τὸ θεῖο κορμό σου!*⁷⁵

In this and the following stanza the vision of the palm tree as an ideal (*ἰδανικό*), a symbol of perfect beauty, of the sovereignty of the divine feminine life principle, is more clearly pictured than anywhere else in the poem. I have already mentioned Palamas' preoccupation with the concept of sovereignty and in these verses we have one of the finest examples of his ability to give lyrical form to this concept in terms simultaneously of the physical and metaphysical realm of existence. Up to this point the palm tree has been an impersonal entity of supernatural power, essentially remote from the life forms that surround it, adorning and adorned by them, but beyond and unaffected by their struggle for existence. To the soul-flowers reflecting upon her freedom and their own limitations the palm tree has till now seemed to inhabit a plane of existence denied to them, unknowing of the agony of struggling to reach beyond itself to a higher, more complete understanding of creation. From this point on the transition gradually takes place of the soul-flowers from a garland of imprisoned mortality encircling the palm tree's base, through a process of self-realization, to the point at

74. Ibid., p. 131, ll. 16 and 24–5.

75. Ibid., p. 133, ll. 13–18.

which a universal truth about human existence is fully perceived and the soul-flowers, in dying, become themselves one with the palm tree in the corona of the spirit which endows Creation with a new and everlasting beauty. In stanzas 19 and 20 the palm tree is seen to be touched by the longing to reach beyond its own limitations of experience and again at this point the image of the crown is used explicitly to heighten the visual impression of the woman/queen figure of stanzas 16 and 17 and again it is associated with very vivid allusions to the palm tree's possession of demonic power:

*Τὸ στέμμα τῆς κορφῆς σου εἰν' ἔνα ξένο φέμα
ἢ τὰ μαλλιά σου, ποὺ ἡ πνοὴ σὰν τὰ χτυπήσῃ
γίνονται λύρες γιὰ νὰ εἰποῦν δλόγυρά σου
τὴ συμφωνία τῶν δλων καὶ τῆς δμορφιᾶς σου;*
*Μήτε κλαδιά, μήτε μαλλιά. Φτερὰ εἰν' ἐκεῖνα,
καὶ δοκιμάζεις τὰ καὶ τὰ τρεμοσαλεύεις.
Φτερά; δὲν εἶναι, γίνονται· σὲ τρώει μιὰ πεῖνα,
καὶ σὲ μιὰ πλάση ἀνώτερη νᾶμπης παλεύεις.⁷⁶*

In stanzas 21–6 the flowers lament their rooted imprisonment: they who alone perceive the beauty and the power of the palm tree can take no comfort from her existence. She is their whole world and their heaven too, yet they alone, of all the life in the garden, are denied any access to her nourishing loveliness. In stanza 26 she is the primitive earth-mother.

. . . μάννα στρογγυλὴ καὶ καρπερὴ καὶ ἀκέρια

the idea of circularity here conveyed with the epithet *στρογγυλὴ*, not one of the most common in Palamas' poetry, but one which in this instance intensifies the maternally creative aspect of the palm tree as woman symbol. Swiftly the vision changes as the demonic aspect of the tree manifests itself nightmare-like to the fevered soul-flowers, but even now as she generates hideous mutation, corruption and decay in the garden below her material form is delineated by another 'circle' image as she becomes identified with the *στοιχιωμένο τὸ σκληρὸ φεγγάρι*. In

76. *Ibid.*, p. 134, ll. 5–12.

stanzas 30 and 31 the soul flowers, withdrawn in introspection, reflect upon the cyclic manifestations of the life processes around them, the corruption and decay that give place to new life, the light-giving and dark aspects of life contained together within the tiny microcosm of the soul. In these verses the palm tree as a visual image fades into the background and the flowers appeal to the primitive deities of life and beauty, the sun and the moon, to banish their 'black dreams' and to 'spread on the savage night a translucent cover of sympathy and love'. With the dawn of the new day the soul-flowers again resume their monologue to the palm tree, but no longer with the cry of the spirit's pain; now they listen to the 'great heartbeat of the earth'⁷⁷ and become conscious of their very special place in the scheme of Creation. They perceive the palm tree with a new vision: she is a manifestation of some divine order, not the source of that sovereignty but an instrument of it. As such she is

'Απάντρευτη, ἀκαρπη, κι' ἀξήγητη καὶ ώραία!

Man alone of earthbound forms shares, however imperfectly, in mind that alone can will the course that Creation will take. Thought is at once his glory and his tragedy, his prison and his deliverance.

*Βουλήθη ὁ θεῖος κόσμος, κ' ἔγινεν Ἰδέα,
καὶ στὴ δικῆ μας φανερώθηκε τὴ σκεψη.⁷⁸*

And so the soul-flowers no longer question the palm tree: they, and not she, hold the answer. Their mortality is unimportant: humanity itself is but a passing phenomenon in the course of Creation's evolution, but because of Man Creation will itself be transformed. What the mind and spirit of mankind have created will adorn Creation for all time to come, and so in the final stanza, through a most subtly suggestive use of imagery, the encircling garland of earthbound soul-flowers is transformed to become the corona of Man's spirit which at once adorns and transforms the palm tree, shedding a new and brilliant light on the universe. 'Man is nothing, but Mankind is everything.'

77. Ibid., p. 137, l. 24.

78. Ibid., p. 138, ll. 19–20.

*Καὶ μήτε θὰ βρεθῇ γιὰ μᾶς κανένα μυῆμα
τοῦ διάβα μας τὸ φάντασμα νὰ συγκρατήσῃ·
μονάχα δλόφωτο τριγύρω σου ἔνα ντύμα
μὲ νέα μιὰ λάμψη ἀχάλαστη θὰ σὲ στολίσῃ,
καὶ θὰ είναι ἡ σκέψη μας κι ὁ λόγος μας καὶ ἡ ρίμα.
Καὶ θὰ φανῆς ἐσὺ στὴν ζαφνισμένη χτίση
σὰν ἔνα χρυσοπράσινο καινούριο δαστέρι.
Καὶ μήτ' ἐσύ, μήτε κανεὶς δὲ θὰ μᾶς ξέρῃ . . .*

Although there is here no explicit use of the *στέμμα/κορώνα* image, the visual impression built up by its occurrence on previous occasions in the poem has carried forward to this point, so that we see the brilliant light of the 'green-gold star', the *νέα μιὰ λάμψη ἀχάλαστη*, as a *κορώνα* adorning and simultaneously transforming the palm tree. The image is the more powerful and its implications the more sublimely expressed for the absence of the explicit term: the poet's oblique allusion allows the mind to imagine freely, unhampered by any limiting material connotations.

To conclude this examination of Palamas' use of images of encirclement and enchantment I come back to the question of his attraction to such images as a feature of his natural thought flow. I have already quoted Palamas' own comments on his predilection for 'cyclic thinking'. How much a natural feature of his thought processes this thinking in *κυκλικὲς μορφές* had become is interestingly demonstrated by his definition of poetry as the *στεφάνωμα τοῦ στοχαστικοῦ ὄντερον*⁷⁹ and by his comment in 1923 on his first collection of *Iambs and Anapaests*, that in these experimental verses he was attempting to combine these two different metrical forms harmoniously within *τὸ δαχτυλίδι τοῦ ρυθμοῦ*. No other Greek poet, I think, has explored the symbolic possibilities of the 'circle' image to such varied and lyrical effect as Kostis Palamas.

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79. Vol. VII, p. 438.